



National Multiple Sclerosis Society
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**Testimony in Support of the Commission on Aging
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and
The Office of the Healthcare Advocate
Government Administration and Elections Committee Public Hearing
March 16, 2009**

Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, Senator Meyer, Representative Aresimowicz, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hetherington and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee,

My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy and Programs for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter. I am also the family care giver representative to the CT Long Term Care Advisory Council and I serve on the Money Follows the Person Steering Committee. I have been involved in advocacy, providing services and in policy development assisting elders and persons with disabilities for over 25 years in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about our concerns regarding the proposed elimination of the Commission on Aging, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the Office of the Healthcare Advocate that are included in the Governor's Bill No. 840, An Act Concerning the Elimination of the Office of the Consumer Counsel, The Office of the Healthcare Advocate, The Office of Ombudsman for Property Rights and Certain Legislative Commissions.

As Connecticut faces the most severe economic crisis in more than half a century, we must be prudent about how all funds are spent in our state. Yet at the same time, we must not be foolish about eliminating programs or commissions that save money and provide opportunities for volunteers to assist the state in caring for its residents. The National Multiple Sclerosis Society urges the Legislature and Governor Rell to keep funding for the Commission on Aging (CoA), Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and its affiliate, the Connecticut Women's Health Campaign (CWHC) and the Office of Healthcare Advocate (OHA).

These two Commissions and the Office of Healthcare Advocate are an essential part of the non-partisan programs that are working to advocate and support the needs of Connecticut's residents.

Although the CoA's and PCSW's titles indicate that they are helping women and elders, in reality their superb work reaches way beyond the scope of their title. Both agencies are independent, yet provide robust leadership in the community. Their work on issues around economic security, workforce development, long term care, health care and their timely research and initiatives to save money are crucial given the horrific budget challenges that our state faces. The Commission on Aging and the PCSW operate with small budgets, maximize the use of volunteers, research and facilitate understanding of many of our state's challenges all while developing outstanding community partnerships which can help to broker important relationships that play a role in helping to solve many of our state's problems.

These two commissions not only provide the leadership, but actually get the work done! Examples include:

- The CoA improves access to information for older adults, persons with disabilities, families and caregivers by working with OPM to create and now maintain the state's Long-Term Care web site. The web site received over 80,000 visits last year alone (www.ct.gov/longtermcare).
- CoA leads efforts to mandate and fund the state's first comprehensive Long-Term Care Needs Assessment, a roadmap to planning for the future needs in our state.
- CoA work has been successful in bridging across multiple generations by working with schools statewide to link them with Earth's Elders, a FREE unique school curriculum that connects students with older adults in their communities.
- The CT Women's Health Campaign and PCSW are responsible for significant changes in access to and provision of health care services for women in our state through legislation and partnerships that have:
 - Improved access to gynecological health care services for women of all ages who are living with disabilities.
 - Banned the use of "drive-through" childbirths, Caesarian sections, and mastectomies.
- PCSW championed the rights of all workers by creating legislation that led to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.
- The CoA and PCSW have provided support that lead to the successful passage of the CT Home Care Program for Disabled Adults which is serving people with degenerative neurological conditions who are between the ages of 18 and 64. This provides an alternative to expensive nursing home care. The CHCPDA program can save the state \$2,055,576 each year.

- These two commissions also actively working on ways to increase savings in our state budget as well as working to find new ways to maximize existing and develop new revenue sources.

The Office on the Healthcare Advocate is an agency that creates savings and eliminating this essential office is counter-productive given the crisis in healthcare in our nation. Connecticut's Office of the Healthcare Advocate leads the way in the nation as a consumer watchdog and resource to help individuals facing challenges when dealing with health insurance matters.

- OHA is funded, not through the state's General Fund, but via the Insurance Fund, a levy on insurance companies, cuts to OHA will go back as a credit to the Insurance Industry.
- OHA has a high level of success in coordinating benefits. When patients max-out private insurance because of catastrophic illness, they turn to a public program like Medicaid. OHA ensures that the private coverage meets all its obligations before the public insurance kicks in.
- OHA helped more than 2,000 patients last year to resolve problems with their health coverage, resulting in \$5,200,000 in consumer savings last year – the value of the claims that we helped to overturn.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society urges the Government Administration and Elections Committee to reject the portions of SB 840 that eliminate CoA, PCSW and OHA. These essential advocacy groups provide much greater savings than the expense of their small budgets.

The 6,000 people with multiple sclerosis in Connecticut rely on these groups to help advocate for issues that advance public policy and programs that improve the quality of life for all of Connecticut's residents.

Thank you.